



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Big Piney
Ranger District

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File Code: 1950

Date: March 03, 2022

Dear Friend of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests:

The Big Piney Ranger District on the Ozark-St Francis National Forests is proposing a project with the purpose of ensuring the Blue Hole Special Interest Area retain its “undisturbed and natural conditions” for primitive and non-mechanized recreational enjoyment, to improve water quality, and protect the geological and scenic values for which the area was designated.

The Arkansas Wilderness Act of 1984 evaluated federal lands for suitable wilderness characteristics, some of which were established as designated Wilderness Areas and included the designation of the East Fork Wilderness Area. In the Congressional notes of the Act, the Forest Service was directed to protect the geological and scenic values of a unique area containing the body of water south of the East Fork Wilderness Area that is created by the confluence of Wolf Creek and Hurricane Creek named the Blue Hole: *“In order to ensure that the Blue Hole area is protected from degradation the Committee expects the Forest Service to manage the area and adjacent watershed ... to retain its undisturbed and natural conditions.”*

The surrounding 2,190 acres (see map) was designated in 1986 as the Blue Hole Special Interest Area (SIA), and direction for management of this special interest area was included in the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests’ 2005 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. The SIA is a unique treasure of a wild landscape where the public visits the “blue hole” to swim and enjoy its scenic values.

Road systems on the national forest provide access for multiple uses and contribute to erosion in the watershed. Evaluating the road system density, efficacy and purpose are part of balancing management for watershed improvement and access. The 28.3 miles of roads within this project shown on the 2022 MVUM were recently visited resulting in the following management actions proposed to bring the Blue Hole Special Interest Area more in line with the 1984 Congressional notes:

- 4.6 miles will be maintained and remain open to passenger vehicles providing access to the Blue Hole, private land, and existing dispersed camping areas as highlighted in green on the draft map.
- 4.7 miles currently being used by passenger vehicles but are poorly located, causing erosion and predominately within the SIA will be rehabilitated and closed to improve



overall watershed health by reducing erosion. These roads are highlighted in yellow on the draft map.

- The remaining 19 miles currently not being used by passenger vehicles will be rehabilitated and closed due to nonuse and to improve overall watershed health.

This proposed project implements Forest Plan direction and will be subject to the administrative review objection procedures identified in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B. For objection eligibility, only those who have submitted timely, specific written comments during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection.

This is an opportunity to provide scoping comments on this proposal and is an early notification in compliance with public involvement requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

In order to identify issues resulting from this proposal and better assess its effects, I would appreciate your site/project specific responses and/or concerns sent to: Timothy E. Jones, District Ranger, 12,000 SR 27, Hector, AR 72843. Responses may be mailed electronically to our office, in a common digital format, at comments- southern-ozark-stfrancis-bayou@usda.gov. Please state "2022 Blue Hole Project" in the subject line when providing electronic comments or on the envelope when replying by mail. In order to continue to receive information about this project proposal and to proceed in a timely manner, your responses should be postmarked or received within 30 days of the postmark on this letter. Unless previous arrangements are made, hand delivered written comments will not be received at the Hector or Jasper District Offices at this time due to COVID-19. Information may also be obtained by visiting the National Forest website <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61646> or by contacting Mike Mulford at the Big Piney District Office in Jasper, AR by email michael.mulford@usda.gov.

Sincerely,



TIMOTHY E. JONES
District Ranger